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'Funded lobby' in Afghan Taliban seeks conflict: FO

• Warns Afghan regime against trying to exploit Pashtun card in Pakistan • Accuses Taliban of 'ploy' to rebrand terrorists as refugees • Claims to have no information about meeting of PM's adviser with Israeli diplomat

Dawn Report

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Office (FO) spokesperson Tahir Hussain Andrabi asserted on Friday that while certain factions within the Afghan Taliban regime do not want confrontation, a "strong lobby" within the group, backed by foreign funding, has been tasked with "stoking tension" with Islamabad.

In a wide-ranging weekly press briefing, the spokesperson delivered a stern message to Kabul, accusing parts of the Taliban regime of engaging in abuses and making outrageous allegations that are undermining bilateral relations.

"These elements have been engaged in abuses and outrageous allegations against Pakistan, and in doing so, they are fast eroding whatever goodwill they had," Mr Andrabi said.

He also countered claims of internal discord within Pakistan on its approach to Afghanistan, stating there is national consensus on the issue.

"Some elements in the Taliban regime are also trying to propagate that there is some disagreement within Pakistan over its Afghan policy. This is misleading," Mr Andrabi said. "There is absolute clarity among the people of Pakistan that ordinary people are the biggest victims of terrorist activities by elements hiding in Afghanistan."

The spokesperson's remarks followed the conclusion of a third round of bilateral talks in Istanbul on Nov 7.

The negotiations were aimed at curbing cross-border terrorism and solidifying a fragile ceasefire brokered after border clashes last month. Representatives from the two countries had previously met in Doha and Istanbul, but a final agreement has remained elusive. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has confirmed a ceasefire is still in place "for the time being."

Mr Andrabi clarified Pakistan's stance on dialogue, reiterating that while communication with the Kabul government remains open, it will not negotiate with militant organisations.

"Pakistan has never eschewed dialogue with any government in Kabul," he said. "However, Pakistan will not hold dialogue with any terrorist groups, be it the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) or Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)."

He expressed appreciation for the "sincere efforts" of Qatar and Turkiye in mediating the talks.

Mr Andrabi detailed a sharp increase in attacks originating from Afghanistan since the Taliban seized power in August 2021.

"Throughout these years, Pakistan — despite suffering military and civilian casualties — exercised maximum restraint and did not escalate," he said, adding that Pakistan had expected the Taliban regime to take "concrete actions" against the banned TTP over time.

He noted that Islamabad had made numerous positive overtures, including bilateral trade concessions and humanitarian assistance, to engage the Afghan government.

"However, despite all these positive gestures by Pakistan, the response from the Taliban regime has only been hollow promises and inaction," Mr Andrabi regretted. The spokesperson declared the TTP and BLA "enemies of Pakistan" and issued a stark warning to their supporters. "Anyone harbouring, abetting or financing them is not considered a friend and a well-wisher of Pakistan and its people," he said. He accused the Taliban regime of attempting to mischaracterise the security issue as a humanitarian one by framing militants of TTP and BLA as refugees.

Mr Andrabi also addressed what he described as attempts by elements within the Taliban to foment ethnic unrest inside Pakistan.

He said, "It is a historical fact that Pashtuns in Pakistan are a vibrant part of society and state, holding leadership positions across the spectrum of public life and civil society. More Pashtuns live in Pakistan than in Afghanistan; therefore, instead of instigating Pashtunism in Pakistan, it would be wise for the Taliban regime to look into its own credentials."

'No knowledge'

When questioned about a viral social media video showing the prime minister's tourism coordinator, Sardar Yasir Ilyas, with an Israeli official, Mr Andrabi said he was not aware of the interaction.

"I have no information on this meeting. The gentleman you referred to is a public figure. I would request you to ask him about the meeting. I have no information on this," he said.

The video, posted on X by Israeli journalist Rai Kais and London-based journalist Murtaza Ali Shah, shows Ilyas shaking hands and conversing with Michael Izhar-Kov, the director general of Israel's Ministry of Tourism, at the WTM tourism fair in London.

A translation from the Hebrew text in the Israeli journalist's post read: "During the WTM tourism fair in London, the Director General of Israel's Ministry of Tourism, Michael Itzhakov, was recorded at the booth of Muslim Pakistan — a country that has no relations with Israel — shaking hands with the Pakistani prime minister's adviser on tourism, Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan. As a reminder, Pakistan was recently mentioned as one of the countries that might join the international force in Gaza."

A PALESTINIAN man fixes his makeshift shelter after the first winter rain in Gaza City on Friday.—AFP

Islamabad, regional allies support US resolution on Gaza peace

Joint statement endorses process that offers pathway to Palestinian self-determination and statehood

By Anwar Iqbal

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan joined other key Muslim and Arab states on Friday in expressing support for a US resolution that seeks to deploy an international stabilisation force in Gaza.

In a statement issued at the UN Headquarters, Pakistan, Qatar, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Jordan, Turkiye and the United States expressed their joint support for the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution currently under consideration, drafted by the US after consultation and in cooperation with council members and partners in the region.

"The historic Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict, announced on Sept 29, is endorsed by the resolution and was celebrated and endorsed in Sharm Al Sheikh," it read.

"We are issuing this statement as the member states that gathered during High-Level Week to begin this process, which offers a pathway to Palestinian self-determination and statehood.

"We emphasise that this is a sincere effort, and the Plan provides a viable path towards peace and stability, not only between the Israelis and the Palestinians, but for the entire region," the endorsers said, while expressing the hope for the "resolution's swift adoption".

The United States, in an earlier statement, urged the UNSC to formally endorse its draft resolution aimed at strengthening President Donald Trump's Gaza peace plan, warning that the ceasefire in Gaza remains "fragile".

Russia's resolution

The appeal came as Russia introduced its own resolution on Gaza in the 15-member council, directly challenging the US draft. The council's five permanent members — the United States, Russia, China, Britain, and France — retain the power to veto any resolution.

"Attempts to sow discord now — when agreement on this resolution is under active negotiation — have grave, tangible, and entirely avoidable consequences for Palestinians in Gaza," the US mission to the UN said in a statement.

It added that the ceasefire was fragile and "we urge the Council to unite and move forward to secure the peace that is desperately needed."

The mission informed council members that in mid-October, the US began drafting a UNSC resolution with input from its partners in Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, and the United Arab Emirates. "The simple, straightforward point of this resolution is to bring to fruition President Trump's historic 20-point comprehensive plan to end the Gaza conflict, as supported by over 20 countries in Sharm Al Sheikh on Oct 13, 2025," the mission added.

It recalled that in the week of Nov 3, the United States began "good-faith negotiations" on this draft in New York, working closely with members of the Security Council and its partners. The purpose of these talks was to "reach consensus on a draft that would stand up the International Stabilisation Force (ISF) and begin a stable, secure, peaceful and prosperous future for Palestinians in Gaza, free of Hamas", it stated.

'Two-year mandate'

The mission assured the UNSC that this effort built on President Trump's widely accepted historic 20-point peace plan endorsed by parties at Sharm al Sheikh. "We urge the Security Council to seize this historic moment to pave a path towards enduring peace in the Middle East by supporting this resolution," it stated. If adopted, the US resolution would authorise a two-year mandate running until the end of 2027 for a transitional governance body in Gaza — known as the "Board of Peace" — that President Trump would chair. It would also authorise member states to form a temporary ISF tasked with the "permanent decommissioning of weapons from non-state armed groups", protecting civilians, and securing humanitarian aid corridors in Gaza.

Trump has ruled out sending US troops into Gaza as part of the proposed 20,000-strong force.

PM Shehbaz celebrates King Charles' birthday

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif joined British High Commissioner Jane Marriott on Friday to welcome guests at a celebration for King Charles III's 77th birthday.

According to a statement from the British High Commission, the celebration followed a significant year for the UK-Pakistan relationship.

The statement highlighted improved connectivity with the lifting of an air safety ban on Pakistani airlines, which led to Pakistan International Airlines' first flight to Manchester in five years. The UK also introduced eVisas for students and workers this year to ease travel and strengthen ties.

Over the past year, bilateral trade reached £5.5 billion, crossing the £5bn mark for the first time, the statement said. The UK also continued its support for Pakistan's flood recovery efforts and launched a UK–Pakistan Trade Dialogue to open new opportunities.

"Just as Pakistan is made up of rich and diverse cultures, the UK has incredible diversity through its four nations," Ms Marriott said. "And all four of our nations — England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales — have a vital part to play in our partnership with Pakistan."

The event celebrated the cultural ties between the two countries. Guests arrived to the music of bagpipers from the Pakistani military, and singer Maria Unera performed a medley of classic British hits.

Modi claims big win in Bihar election

• Cites peaceful polling with no violence or recounts, though concerns over election fairness persist • Opposition shocked as Congress suffer major setback, alleging unfair and rigged elections

By Our Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Bihar assembly results on Friday strengthened Prime Minister Narendra Modi's position in his coalition government, mocked a drastically weakened opposition, but once again kept the right-wing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in a secondary role in the crucial north Indian state.

Modi had announced his plan for military action against Pakistan from Bihar, a move that led to Operation Sindoor. It remains unclear whether the Bihar election results will help calm tensions along the border.

The outcome shocked the opposition, whose leaders — principally the Congress party's Rahul Gandhi and former chief minister Lalu Yadav's son Tejashwi Yadav — had hoped to secure a winning margin by accusing the BJP of rigging the elections with the alleged connivance of the Election Commission.

Deepankar Bhattacharya, general secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), was the first opposition leader to publicly admit his surprise at the verdict. The verdict is also expected to bring relief to big businesses whose close ties with Modi had come under scrutiny during the campaign. *NDTV* — now owned by industrialist Gautam Adani — questioned Rahul Gandhi's low visibility during the polls. *India Today* published a fact-check investigating whether he had flown to London; a Congress spokesperson clarified that a photo of him at Heathrow was from September.

Rahul Gandhi later appeared on X, criticising what he called an unfair electoral process. "I express my heartfelt gratitude to those millions of voters in Bihar who expressed their trust in the Mahagathbandhan. This result in Bihar is truly surprising. We could not achieve victory in an election that was not fair from the very beginning. This fight is for the protection of the Constitution and democracy."

The BJP said it had gained significantly on a platform of job creation and economic revival for the perennially backward state, securing 89 seats — up from 74 in the 243-member assembly.

Govt forms journalists' protection commission

ISLAMABAD: The government has constituted a 12-member Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals, mainly comprising journalists from across the country.

The notification issued by the information ministry states the independent commission will exercise powers and perform functions laid down in the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act, 2021, aimed at safeguarding the rights and safety of journalists.

The formation of the commission had been a longstanding demand of media workers.

The 12-member commission includes two ex-officio representatives from federal government.

The commission, which is represented by the three main factions of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), will have National Press Club Secretary Nayyer Ali, Ghulam Nabi Yousafzai, secretary of the Press Association of the Supreme Court and Naveed Akbar Chaudhary of the Parliamentary Report-ers Association of Pakistan as its members.

Also, PFUJ Barna President Afzal Butt, Hassan Abbas from PFUJ (Barna-Rana Azem group), Nawaz Raza from PFUJ Dastoor, Tahir Hassan Khan from Karachi Union of Journalists, Tamsela Chishti from Punjab Union of Journalists and Nadia Saboohi from Khyber Union of Journalists, and Khalil Ahmed from Balochistan Union of Journalists will be part of the commission.—Kalbe Ali

Pakistan's internet freedom sees sharp dip in past 15 years: report

• Global watchdog ranks country 27th out of 100 • India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh fared better • China, Iran and Russia at bottom

Dawn Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has been ranked 27th out of 100 — 'Not Free' — in terms of internet freedom by a global democracy watchdog in a recent report, which cited government measures to expand censorship practices.

During June 1, 2024 to May 31, 2025, the report issued by the US-based Freedom House noted that the authorities threatened to block virtual private networks (VPNs) and adopted amendments to the country's cybercrime law that rights groups said could be abused.

On the other hand, countries like India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh are markedly more open, classified as 'Partly Free', with much higher freedom scores of 51, 53, and 45, respectively. The watchdog was unable to track Afghanistan's score.

The countries placed at the bottom are China, Myanmar, Iran and Russia with scores of 9, 9, 13,and 17, respectively.

The watchdog noted that governments in the countries that suffered the most extreme declines over the 15 years of global deterioration in internet freedom — Pakistan, Egypt, Russia, Turkiye, and Venezuela — intensified their control over the online environment in response to challenges to their rule.

Between 2011 to 2015, Pakistan's internet freedom deteriorated sharply, plunging from 55 to 69.

From 2012 onwards, the status moved from 'Partly Free' to 'Not Free', reflecting increasing restrictions.

"Pakistanis reported periods of poor internet quality and disruptions to their access to WhatsApp, Signal, and other platforms throughout the coverage period," the report noted.

"Researchers found that the connectivity disruptions were likely linked to the deployment of new website monitoring and blocking technology," it added.

It noted that in November last year, the authorities restricted internet services across Islamabad as widespread protests in support of former prime minister Imran Khan took place. "[Imran] Khan was imprisoned throughout the coverage period."

It continued that the platform became accessible during a four-day military conflict between Pakistan and India, which followed a terrorist attack in occupied Kashmir's Pahalgam.

It maintained that "the military establishment sought to curtail the influence" of the PTI founder and his party.

VPNs

The report noted that in May this year, Pakistani officials unblocked X (formerly Twitter), which had been restricted since February 2024.

"Authorities repeatedly threatened to block VPNs operating in Pakistan without registration. Registration requirements released in Nov 2024 required the disclosure of information identifying customers; however, at the end of the month authorities said they would not block unregistered VPN connections," the report noted.

"The development reportedly came after the law ministry found that the government lacked legal standing to block VPNs."

The watchdog noted that amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca) signed into law in January 2025 contained ambiguous language rights groups said could be used to remove online speech deemed undesirable by authorities.

It added that at least five people were sentenced to death during the coverage period after being convicted of blasphemy in connection with material posted online.

The report noted that Pakistan held regular elections under a competitive multiparty system.

"However, the military exerts enormous influence over the conduct of elections, government formation, and policies; intimidates the media; and enjoys impunity for indiscriminate or extralegal use of force," it added.

Of the 72 countries assessed in Freedom on the Net 2025, conditions deteriorated in 28, while 17 countries registered overall gains.

"The authorities often impose selective restrictions on civil liberties. Militants conduct terrorist campaigns against the state and also regularly carry out attacks on members of religious minority groups and other perceived opponents."

Global situation

Overall, it noted that the global internet freedom declined for the 15th consecutive year.

Kenya experienced the most severe decline of the coverage period, after authorities responded to nationwide protests over tax policy in June 2024 by shutting down internet connectivity for around seven hours and arresting hundreds of protesters.

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